

# Detroit Legal News

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## PROFILE IN BRIEF

By JEANINE MATLOW  
Legal News

### Robyn S. Lederman Difference Maker



Robyn S.  
Lederman

Robyn S. Lederman clearly enjoys her day job. The senior trademark counsel at Cantor Colburn LLP in Troy, an intellectual property boutique, works with clients such as Fox Entertainment Group, MySpace Inc., and Mattel. In her spare time, she is busy helping others through a variety of nonprofits.

Lederman realized she wanted to be an attorney while at Michigan State University.

"I was drawn to political science courses and law school seemed to be a natural extension of that path," she says.

When she went to the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University in New York, she says, "I was fortunate to have teachers that included the author of the reference treatise in the field of copyright, the Commissioner of the NBA, and the co-founder of the Innocence Project."

"She would practice commercial litigation with a large New York City law firm and have her own family law practice upon returning to Michigan, before finding her niche.

Lederman, who also worked as a trademark attorney in Israel, was appointed to serve on the Famous and Well-Known Marks Committee of the International Trademarks Association (INTA), where she has been actively involved in that regard since 2008.

The attorney, who resides in West Bloomfield, is married with three children; Dean, Eli and Noa. Her favorite pastimes include yoga, walking nature trails, watching her children play sports, and reading a good book.

She currently serves as Executive Board Member and Chair of the Missions Committee for the Michigan Israel Business Bridge (MIBB), which aims, in part, to create jobs and diversify the economy in Michigan.

"Hopefully, this will keep our kids and other Michigan talent in our state," Lederman says. "We strive to tap into the innovation and industries coming out of Israel and into the North American market by introducing Michigan as a place to set up their U.S. arm, whether for sales and marketing, manufacturing and/or partnerships and collaborations with Michigan companies, hospitals and/or universities."

Ron Perry, director of business development for MIBB, says Lederman has taken on a variety of tasks for the organization.

"Robyn brings a unique and admirable level of commitment to this non-profit organization," he says. "She is the cream of the crop. She is very, very passionate about what she does. This stems from a real desire to see the economy of Michigan change. She wants her kids and other kids to find it beneficial to stay in Michigan."

Lederman also was appointed to serve on the Jewish Education Division of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, which determines financial allocations from federation to the Detroit area Jewish day schools.

In addition, she is a committee member of the JCC Day Camp, working to make sure the day camp is available to all members of the community, including those with disabilities.

"We have hosted Israeli counselors in our house for the last four summers," Lederman says.

So, how does she manage to find enough hours in the day?

"Somehow the busier I am the more effective and efficient I am with my time," Lederman says.

"I love giving back to the community and getting to know our local organizations and the people involved. It is not necessary to give money donations to promote and affect philanthropy. There are so many people that I now consider friends and colleagues who I would have never met through any other channels," she says.

Lederman says her work also doesn't hurt as a marketing and networking tool for her profession, although that is a much more difficult return to measure. More importantly, she says, "I also like to think that my kids see it as a good example of how to live one's best life."



Cooley Professor Alan Gershel is flanked by law students John Hohmeier and Martine Denis.

Photo by Paul Janczewski

## Call to Duty

Law students help sift through cases from Detroit Crime Lab

By PAUL JANCZEWSKI  
Legal News

Sloppy and incompetent work that caused the closing of the Detroit Crime Lab - Unforgivable.

Convictions that may have been based on that faulty evidence - Injustice.

Enlisting Cooley Law School students to work with officials examining thousands of cases to uncover potential errors - Priceless.

It may sound like an advertisement for a credit card, but if it were, that card would carry an interest rate called life - perhaps in prison.

It has been widely reported that the Detroit Crime Lab was closed down in 2008 after a Michigan State Police audit revealed errors, originating from that lab, in some evidence used to prosecute murder defendants and other crimes. Those findings showed problems with ballistics and firearm residue, among other errors.

At the time, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said the report revealed a "shocking level of incompetence" at the lab, and said the lab met a woeful 42 percent of a required 100 percent in recognized work standards.

Because of those difficulties, some people now imprisoned based on evidence at trial from the Detroit Crime Lab, may have been the victims of wrongful convictions. And conversely, some may have gone uncharged based on the lab's faulty findings.

One entity looking into those wrongful convictions is the State Appellate Defenders Office (SADO). But with its limited resources and personnel, the task of going back through years and years of those cases is a monumental task.

But once again, like a good neighbor, the Thomas M. Cooley Law School has enlisted students to volunteer their time in combing over those cases and helping SADO determine

if a retesting of the evidence used to convict is warranted.

It began when John Nussbaumer, dean of Cooley's Auburn Hills Campus and a member of the Appellate Defender Commission, learned of the dilemma SADO was facing in reviewing convictions of their clients that may have been tarnished through faulty Detroit Crime Lab work.

"I volunteered our students" to assist SADO, he said. And like any good administrator, Nussbaumer turned over the project to Associate Professor Alan Gershel.

"And he made me look good," Nussbaumer said of Gershel's guidance in finding the students and hooking up with SADO.

Gershel is no stranger to the criminal prosecution arena. Besides teaching a criminal law class at Cooley, Gershel, who joined the staff full time in 2008, served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Detroit for nearly 30 years and was most recently Chief of the Eastern District's Criminal Division.

Besides holding several positions with the U.S. Attorney's Office through his career, Gershel served as an adjunct professor not only at Cooley, but at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, where he received his own law degree in 1978.

He has received recognitions for his work, making Gershel not only an accomplished attorney, but also well-qualified to oversee a project of this magnitude. And he was well-aware of the problems found at the Detroit Crime Lab, and the ripple effect it created.

"It caused a top-to-bottom review of many cases," Gershel said. "It was an enormous project."

The audit found a 10 percent error rate of ballistics results, as well as a plethora of non-compliance and quality issues.

"It has since spread to other aspects of the crime lab," Gershel said.

Many of those cases involved SADO clients, said Jonathan Sacks, deputy director of the Detroit SADO office. He's been with the office for six years, the past 2- as deputy director. Sacks said SADO represents a quarter of indigent Michigan defendants in their appeals of criminal convictions.

Sacks said after the "scandal" that closed down the lab, his office had to examine thousands of cases where SADO clients were convicted and evidence from the Detroit Crime Lab was used. The office has received a grant to assist in the search.

"We've looked back five years, and there are hundreds of cases" that fall under that leaky umbrella, he said.

"And nobody knows how far back (the lab) was unreliable."

He said initially, they are only looking back to convictions in the last six years. But they may look further than that, which could involve "thousands of convictions."

He said the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office is conducting its own review of cases.

As for SADO, Sacks said, "It's a long, involved process involving very tedious work. But it is very rewarding."

Gershel said some Cooley students were approached about volunteering for the project. They receive no school credit, and no monetary benefits, but receive an opportunity to dig into real cases - murders, robberies, rape, and assaults, among others - and get a feel for some of the documents they will be using if they enter the field of criminal law.

Gershel said students started the work last summer, which includes reviewing a prosecutor's closing statements, court transcripts, police reports and other evidence from trial. If they determine evidence from the Detroit Crime Lab was used to convict someone, the case is presented to SADO for further review.

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## Rallying Call MAJ mapping plans for annual meeting

By MIKE SCOTT  
Legal News

Recent debate over health care reform and subsequent discussions about whether reducing the ability of consumers to bring malpractice lawsuits against physicians and other medical professionals is just the latest volley in the struggle to defend civil justice that the Michigan Association for Justice (MAJ) wages every day.

So a variety of issues relating to both the tort system and the education of members and statewide residents will be on the agenda during the MAJ's annual convention, scheduled for May 7-8 at the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn.

For 65 years the members of the MAJ have been representing Michigan families in their battle for justice. There are more than 1,700 MAJ members today and one of their goals is to promote the legal tort system as a vehicle for effective change and consumer protection, while holding wrongdoers accountable for their actions.

Executive Director Jane Bailey has focused many of her staff's efforts on defending the tort system to provide residents with basic judicial rights. She characterizes an effort by opponents of the current tort system as an "unrelenting campaign to deny people justice," but admits that faced with the prospect of being on the opposing side of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and many large business and trade organizations, the MAJ always faces an uphill battle.

"We have a responsibility to educate the public and lawmakers on the value of the tort system and that it is the vehicle that speaks for children and adults who otherwise don't have a voice," Bailey said. "We encourage our members to contact the media and other members to make sure state civil justice rights aren't denied."

Education and skill enhancement remains a key focus of MAJ, both in developing its message about the country's tort system and in other ways as well, said MAJ President Richard Warsh, a Southfield-based lawyer whose term will expire in July. At that time current President-elect Barry Gates from Ann Arbor will become the president for 2010-11.

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Jane  
Bailey



Richard  
Warsh

## DAILY BRIEFS

### 'Black Classicists, Black Lawyers and Some Detroit Connections' at Wayne Law School April 13

DETROIT (April 6, 2010) - Wayne State University Law School and the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights are pleased to host a lecture by Wayne State University Professor Michele Valerie Ronnick titled "Black Classicists, Black Lawyers and Some Detroit Connections" from 12:15 - 1:15 p.m. on Tuesday, April 13, 2010, in the Law School's Spencer M. Partrich Auditorium.

A renowned expert in WSU's Department of Classical and Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures in the university's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Professor Ronnick will address the lives and work of William Sanders Scarborough, Richard T. Greener, D. Augustus Straker, and Dr. William Lewis Bulkley and his son-in-law John Dancy Campbell, Jr.

"The Keith Collection is committed to the study and propagation of African American Legal History," said Wayne Law Professor and Director of the Keith Center for Civil Rights Peter Hammer. "We are fortunate to have someone with the stature of Professor Ronnick as one of our featured speakers. Today's lawyers have much to learn from the pioneering efforts of those who have come before us."

Professor Ronnick has taught at WSU for 17 years. She is the president of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South as well as a member of a large number of professional organizations including the American Association for Neo-Latin Studies, the American Classi-

cal League, the American Philological Association, the Southern Conference on African American Studies and the College Language Association. She has received numerous honors and awards including the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching at WSU in 1998.

This event is free and open to the public. Lunch will be served. Parking is available in Structure #1 for \$4.25 across from the Law School on West Palmer Street. For more information, please contact Holly Hughes at (313) 577-3620 or hhughes@wayne.edu.

### Michigan Dems hosting forum for gov. candidates April 18 at Cobo

LANSING, Mich. (AP) - The Michigan Democratic Party is planning a forum for its gubernatorial candidates.

The event is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. April 18 at Cobo Center in Detroit.

The forum will include Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero, House Speaker Andy Dillon and state Rep. Alma Wheeler Smith. Each is seeking the Democratic nomination to run for governor this year.

The forum will be moderated by Michigan Democratic Party Chairman Mark Brewer. It will include questions from the audience.

Michigan Democrats also announced Monday that U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland will be the keynote speaker for their annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner on April 17 at Detroit's Cobo Center. Democrats also will endorse candidates for attorney general and secretary of state at a separate event April 17.

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